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Specimen of Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* from the Islamic Republic of Iran

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On 19 November 1968, mammalogist Douglas M. Lay collected a juvenile female Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* that was deposited at the Museum of Natural Science, Louisiana State University (LSUMZ 85937; Fig. 1). The bird was 'shot in thick *Populus euphratica* and *Tamarix* sp. "jungle" along the Karkheh River, 17 km south-west of the city of Shush, Khuzestan province, in south-western Iran. The locality, 17 km south-west of Shush, is not precisely situated along the Karkheh River, and presumably reflects an inaccuracy on the behalf of the collector, who we unsuccessfully attempted to contact, meaning we are unable to present more data concerning the specimen's collection. There are no records in Iran or anywhere else in the Middle East (Scott & Adhami 2006, Porter & Aspinall 2010).

P. brachyura breeds in tropical submontane forest and scrub from north-central (Sikkim) and perhaps north-east India (Assam, breeding unconfirmed) and central Nepal, through north-east Pakistan and south-west to the Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra (Grimmett *et al.* 1999, Birdlife International 2013). The species is a long-distance migrant and winters from central India south to Sri Lanka, mostly in the southern part of that range. Except records in south-east Pakistan and the Indian Thar desert (Kamal 1978, Singh 2004), long-distance vagrancy is unknown. A closely related (Irestedt *et al.* 2006) migratory species, Blue-winged Pitta *P. moluccensis* of South-East Asia, has strayed to Christmas Island and Australia, which are 500–3,000 km from the non-breeding range (Serventy 1968, Benson



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Figure 1. Dorsal (above) and ventral (below) views of Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* specimen (LSUMZ 85937) from Khuzestan province, Islamic Republic of Iran, 19 November 1968, collected by Douglas M. Lay (Paul van Els)

1970). The nearest breeding grounds of Indian Pitta are in the Margalla Hills of north-east Pakistan, *c*.2,300 km east-northeast of Khuzestan. However, this population is very small (18–20 pairs, Roberts 1992), making it probable that the specimen originated from further away. The westernmost population departs the breeding grounds in October, later than eastern birds (Roberts 1992). The mid-November date of the Iran record is slightly later than the mean arrival date on the wintering grounds in Sri Lanka (Brown 1931), but may be the result of a vagrant lingering, as has been noted in other species (Post 2008, Breaks 2009), or an attempt to overwinter. Furthermore, the specimen lacks the red on the underparts indicative of an adult, which lends further support to a vagrant origin, because juveniles frequently comprise a large proportion of vagrants (Baker 1977, Alerstam 1990, Taylor *et al.* 1994, Thorup *et al.* 2011).

The specimen measurements are as follows: maxilla 19.3 mm, mandible 22.8 mm, tarsus 33.9 mm, wing 103.5 mm. No mass was recorded. These measurements fall within the size range typical of the species (Erritzoe & Erritzoe 1998). The specimen has worn primaries and rectrices, mostly shortened barbs on the outer vanes, but also broken rachides, which could indicate a captive origin. Pittas are occasionally kept in captivity (Steinbacher 1940), both as pets and for food (Lambert & Woodcock 1996). Furthermore, CITES was only implemented in 1975 (Favre 1989), seven years after the date of collection, and we are unaware of other controls on the cagebird trade in the region prior to this. Caged birds from the Indian subcontinent, e.g. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, Red Avadavat *Amandava anandava*, and Rose-ringed *Psittacula krameri* and Alexandrine Parakeets *P. eupatria*, were relatively common in the 1970s in Iran (D. A. Scott pers. comm.). However, records of captive Indian Pittas, at least until 1986, are few, with no more than 70 known individuals

traded (Thomsen *et al.* 1986). An alternative cause of the damage may be due to shot, which problem is common in specimens.

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